

LeadSafe Homes: Reimagining a System to
Better Support Families, Our Workforce,
and Economy
Rhode Island Housing
Special Achievement

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Summary

Rhode Island has one of the oldest housing stocks in the country, with more than 70% of homes built before the 1978 ban on lead-based paint. The public health risks—particularly for children—are severe, even life-threatening. For years, RIHousing's LeadSafe Homes Program faced serious barriers to impact due to a critical shortage of certified lead contractors. By 2022, just one lead-certified contractor remained available to RIHousing for our work statewide.

Administered by RIHousing, the LeadSafe Homes Program provides financial assistance to eligible homeowners and landlords to eliminate lead-based paint hazards and make Healthy Homes improvements. But when the global COVID-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, the program was effectively shut down—fieldwork stalled, construction paused, and all program momentum vanished. Within a year, nearly the entire program's leadership turned over, with four managers cycling through, followed by the departure of the department director and key support staff. The program lost its institutional memory just when Rhode Islanders needed it most.

Out of this vacuum, RIHousing saw an opportunity to rebuild—not just our staff, but our structures, systems, and entire strategy. We overhauled our program from the ground up, centering it around a key factor: workforce development. We launched an ambitious initiative to recruit and train new contractors, fund their certifications, mentor them on job sites, and help minority-owned small businesses gain access to government contracting projects. Our commitment into bolstering contractor capacity became the foundation of our program's new chapter.

What was once a stagnant system, with challenges exacerbated by a global pandemic, is now a statewide model—protecting families, growing businesses and the workforce, and ensuring Rhode Island's homes are safe, healthy, and strong for generations to come.

Background

RIHousing has administered lead remediation grants through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) since 1994. Through our LeadSafe Homes Program, we help property owners eliminate lead hazards—particularly in old homes with children under age six or pregnant women. Work includes:

- New windows, doors, and siding
- Interior and exterior painting
- Soil remediation
- General carpentry repairs
- Healthy Homes improvements, such as dryer vents, bathroom fans, minor electrical repairs, and smoke/CO detectors

In late 2019, RIHousing received a new HUD grant focused on addressing the lead crisis in high-need communities in our state. But the program's planned momentum came to a halt just months later, as the COVID-19 pandemic shut down all field activity.

During this period, our program suffered devastating internal instability—an all-too-common workforce struggle many organizations faced in the wake of the pandemic. Four program directors came and went within a year. The assistant director and department director also departed by early 2021. Institutional knowledge was wiped out. And among remaining staff, performance issues led to further turnover. The program was stalled, and increasingly disconnected from the communities it was meant to serve. Compounding the crisis, our state faced an extreme shortage of qualified lead-certified contractors. The certification process is

complex and costly, particularly for small and minority-owned businesses unfamiliar with government bidding. The LeadSafe Homes Program was functionally paralyzed.

By 2022, it was clear: we needed to reimagine this program and its impact.

Creating Solutions to a Health and Workforce Crisis

Recognizing that funding alone could not solve the lead crisis, RIHousing implemented bold, cross-cutting changes to reimagine our LeadSafe Homes Program from top to bottom. We focused on workforce development as a key to driving impact, and ultimately, making progress on our big lead safety goals. We unlocked this impact by focusing on:

- **Workforce development as core strategy**—RIHousing partnered with the Rhode Island Builders Association (RIBA) to identify, recruit, and train new lead contractors. RIHousing paid for training and certification through MassETI, the state’s only licensed lead remediation training provider. We also covered certification for additional crew members, growing company capacity in real time.
- **Hands-on mentorship**—Early projects revealed skill gaps. Poor window installation, for example, led to leaks, water damage, and mold—undoing the benefits of remediation. In response, RIHousing introduced a job site mentorship model. A seasoned master builder, known as “Dr. Door,” provided hands-on contractor guidance on job sites to support and teach quality workmanship. The result: faster learning, safer homes, and more confident contractors able to scale their businesses.

“The supervisor classes have contributed to my business in a special way and the window and door installation classes have been excellent. I think it is good training for business owners.”

—Henri Solares, H. Solares Construction

- **Back-end business support**—Many prospective contractors, especially minority-owned businesses, were deterred, even intimidated, by complex government procurement processes. RIHousing created classes on software systems, smart procurement and bidding, vendor relations and management, and overhead estimation to help better position them to qualify for, bid on, and support state projects.
- **Policy and pricing overhaul**—RIHousing conducted a full review of our program policies and procedures, updating outdated cost structures (unchanged since 2016) and adjusting for pandemic-driven inflation. This ensured both fairness for contractors and sustainability for our program long-term.
- **In-court housing interventions**—We partnered with local housing courts—particularly in Central Falls—to embed RIHousing staff during lead code violation hearings. Rather than further penalize landlords or risk tenant displacement, our team helped property owners begin grant applications for our program in the courtroom. This hands-on, compassionate model created an immediate path to compliance and safety.
- **Shift from loan to grant structure**—To further remove barriers, RIHousing restructured homeowner financing from forgivable loans to outright grants. This simplified participation, eliminated confusion, and increased program appeal and reach.

Achieving Results and Building for the Future

Our program's transformation has been remarkable. Since implementing these changes, our LeadSafe Homes Program has:

- Remediated 115 homes—each protecting children and families from toxic lead exposure
- Continued momentum into 2025—we have 35 units expected to be completed by June, and 23 additional units in the pipeline
- Grown our lead-certified contractor base by 500%—with several of our contractors now having reliable crews to further strengthen their capacity
- Built a stronger contractor pipeline, including many minority-owned small businesses, who are now positioned to grow and compete for larger-scale housing projects
- Kept families housed by preventing evictions and finding unique approaches to landlord/property owner engagement and participation
- Created a replicable workforce development model that ties lead remediation directly to contractor growth and housing investment

Projects take time due to permitting, environmental review, and coordination in occupied homes—but the pace and quality of work have dramatically improved. Contractors are now booked out months in advance, and dozens more are preparing to enter the pipeline.

It's clear that the benefits far outweigh our monetary costs to reimagine our program. While RIHousing has invested \$150,000 in the RIBA partnership, approximately \$3,500 per contractor for training, plus countless hours of staff support and coordination, the return has been exponential. Our impact can be measured not only in the homes and families made safer, but in jobs created, trust rebuilt, and systems changed in our state.

What's Next

As the State of Rhode Island experiences one of the greatest housing crises in its history, RIHousing is preparing to launch a new microgrant program for emerging contractors to strengthen their back-office operations—bookkeeping, insurance, compliance, and growth planning—so they can transition from smaller-scale remediation projects to large-scale affordable housing development. This is the next step in a long-term strategy to tie workforce development directly to our state's broader housing production goals.

Conclusion

Our RIHousing LeadSafe Homes Program has been completely reimaged—it's now a comprehensive, strategic solution to creating safer homes, stronger businesses, and healthier communities. The program's turnaround from pandemic-driven paralysis and institutional knowledge loss to greater community impact is a model for other state Housing Finance Agencies across the country.

By investing in people, and giving them the tools, support, and resources to grow, we've built a program where its benefits ripple far beyond any single housing unit. It builds stronger families, stronger communities, a stronger workforce, and a stronger economy.

Visual: Before and after successful LeadSafe Homes Projects

BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER



BEFORE



AFTER



Visual: Dr. Door Leading a Skills Training Class

Contractor Support

Dr. Door leading a skills training class for RIHousing contractors.





STEP 1: Apply

- Visit: www.rihousing.com/leadsafe-contractors
- Complete application for Lead Contractor

STEP 2: Submit Documents by Email

- Certificate of Registration with RI Contractor’s Licensing Board
- General Liability insurance certificate with a limit of \$1,000,000 per occurrence
- Workman’s Comp \$500,000 (can be added after approval/prior to working for RIHousing)
- W9 (required) and EFT Form for direct deposits (optional), copy of voided check
- Provide SAMS/UEI# documentation
If you do not already have, apply at <https://federal.famr.us/system-for-award-management> and upload a screenshot of your application confirmation



STEP 3: Site Visit, Class Registration, Training and Evaluation

- Site Visit and Evaluation: Coordinated and conducted by RIHousing Construction Specialist
- Due diligence:
 - RIHousing will check RI Contractor’s Board for violations, complaints, etc., and confirm Business Annual filing status and Certificate of Good Standing
- RIHousing will register Contractor and designated employees for Supervisor and Worker Classes pending completion of Step 4
- RIHousing will notify prospective contractors of complementary hands-on skills training classes geared for RIHousing contractors (offered through Residential Construction Workforce Partnership). Attendance, while not required, is strongly encouraged. These classes are opportunities to fine tune skills according to RIHousing-preferred practices and expectations. This makes projects run smoother when actively working on RIHousing jobs. The classes are for skills training only and do not provide certification or licensing.

STEP 4: Blood Work and Respiratory Fit Tests

- Two labs are equipped to provide the necessary testing for lead. Request lead testing.

Corporate Care

1515 Smith St, North Providence, 02911
 (401) 315-7030
 Check or cash only, required day of service
 Cost: \$135.00*

Concentra Care

400 Bald Hill Rd, Warwick, RI, 02886
 (401) 738-8100
 Check, cash or credit card payment required day of service
 Cost: \$169.00*

**Fees may change*

- Appointments necessary
- No beards day of testing for proper mask fit
- Proof of passing Fit Test and blood work results must be forwarded to RIHousing for class registration to be confirmed
- Testing will take approximately 45 minutes to complete

STEP 5: RIHousing Enrolls Contractors in Classes

New General Contractors: One to two supervisors (five days) and two to three workers (three days) will attend Lead supervisor/workers classes. At least one person must be a supervisor and pass an EPA exam (English-only exam) to apply for DOH license. One supervisor must apply for RI Lead Contractor License and one supervisor must take an 8-hour RRP class to apply for Lead Renovation Firm license.

- Course certificates are good for one (1) year
- EPA Exam: 100 questions taken by Supervisors only 1-2 weeks after classes end

STEP 6: Apply for DOH Licenses

Once training is complete and exam passed, applications for Lead Contractors License, Supervisor and Workers Licenses and Lead Renovation Firm can be found at: [Lead Professionals Licensing: Department of Health - https://health.ri.gov/licenses/detail.php?id=270](https://health.ri.gov/licenses/detail.php?id=270)

- Lead Contractor License: Fee \$400.00 (fee NOT covered by RIHousing)
 - Copy of Supervisor certificate must accompany Lead Contractor License application
- Employee Lead Licenses:
 - Supervisor (1 required) - \$200.00 per person (fee NOT covered by RIHousing)
 - Workers - \$60.00 per person (fee NOT covered by RIHousing)
 - Copies of Initial Training certification must accompany application
- Lead Renovation Firm License: \$100 (fee NOT covered by RIHousing)
 - Copy of Lead Renovator Training Certificate must accompany application.

Lead Professionals

Licensing-Related Information

How to Get Licensed

Applications-

- Lead Assessor
- Lead Contractor
- Lead Inspector
- Lead Inspector In Training
- Lead Renovation Firm
- Lead Supervisor
- Lead Training Course
- Lead Worker

Renewal applications are sent out 60 days before your expiration date. If you have lost your renewal application or did not receive one [contact us](#) for a new copy.

You may be required to complete an initial [training course](#), pass a state licensing exam, have a blood lead test, and/or pay a fee to apply for a lead professional license. Specific requirements vary by license type.

[Submit an initial application](#)

We can help you . . .

- ✦ Licensing Forms+
- ✦ Verify a Lead Professionals License
- ✦ Find Licensed Lead Professionals
- ✦ Download Lead Professionals Lists
- ✦ File a Complaint
- ✦ Find Disciplinary Actions

STEP 7: Approved as an RIHousing Lead Contractor

- Contractor provides copies of DOH Lead licenses to RIHousing
- Protocols emailed to contractor to sign and return to RIHousing
- Contractor must provide Workman's Comp if not provided previously
- Contractor is given access to bidding software (Neighborly) and attends meet and greet to meet team and be trained on bid process

CONTACT

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www.rihousing.com/leadsafe-contractors